

Vision



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The Divine Ascent

Plato and Plotinus at Delphi

“We all love unceasingly in one way or another, but nearly all of us love wrongly . . .”

Preface to Marsilio Ficino’s Commentary, *On Love*

Perhaps the Platonic tradition began at the Temple of Apollo in Delphi, three hours’ drive west of Athens and in the shadow of Mt Parnassus. For it is from thence that Chaerophon brought the Oracle’s declaration that, “There is no man wiser than Socrates.” It was therefore fitting that students of Plato, the disciple of Socrates, should spend the last weeks of the Northern summer in the vicinity of that ancient place.

To join this international retreat in the Grecian hills was a rare privilege. Rare also in the sense that it is uncommon nowadays for over a hundred people to meet to study Plato for ten days; and about half that number to spend an additional week reading the landmark Neo-Platonist, Plotinus. They hailed from Galway to Auckland, from Malta to Melbourne.

We were led through the *Symposium* by Dr David Horan of Dublin, who

presided over the gathering. Each morning, groups worked from his translation, it being part of a project to translate all of Plato’s dialogues.

In the afternoons, some would swim at the seaside village at the end of the valley overlooked by the convention centre where we stayed; or lunched in the village of Delphi along the road. Every day the Mediterranean sun poured from glowing blue skies as we drank coffee and debated, or clambered among the monuments of the Temple city nearby on the steep, dry hillsides.



Full evening programmes included elective studies and presentations by guest lecturers including Prof. John Dillon of the Plato Centre in Dublin. Tribute must be paid to the superb organization of the event, and in



particular to the tireless and unobtrusive work of Dr and Mrs Horan.



The setting for the *Symposium* is at a feast hosted by Socrates' beloved friend Agathon, where the guests compete to deliver speeches in praise of the god Love. The centrepiece of this work is Socrates' narration of how the priestess Diotima taught him the strange nature of Love – not a god, but a spirit or *daimon*, an intermediary who is neither wise nor ignorant, neither fair nor foul, born of the union of Poverty and Plenty.

This Love, or *Eros*, was described by Dr Brendan O'Byrne, one of the guest speakers at Delphi, as the

“god of acquisition” – mirrored in Diotima's conclusion that Love is “the love of the everlasting possession of the good.” Those who love seek to “bring to birth in beauty” – that is, in the presence of beauty. Yet it became clear to us that these tidy formulations were not the end and resolution of the dialogue, but only a starting point for wondering, and for wonder. Those who had previously read the *Symposium*, perhaps many times, often commented that it was as if they had never seen it before.

This, no doubt, would have pleased Plato. It is hard to doubt that he wrote the Dialogues not just to be read, but to be discussed by those with willing and receptive minds. In his *Thaetetus* he systematically demolishes both the view that Knowledge is something that may be possessed and stored, and the view that there is no absolute reality beyond what is valid for each individual (relativism). Accordingly the *Symposium* was less a receptacle for answers than the source of questions – and sometimes arguments.

Nor can it be doubted that the other speeches of the dialogue were written purposefully. This is highlighted in Marsilio Ficino's *Commentary* on the *Symposium*, which was introduced to students by Arthur Farndell out of his new translation from the Italian. Ficino, perhaps the greatest figure of the Florentine Renaissance, expanded upon key passages of each speech, such as the famous and almost farcical myth told by the playwright Aristophanes. In this, human beings used to be joined to form circular, eight-limbed beings who, once divided, ever strive to find “their other half”. Or Agathon's own speech, praised by Socrates as being beautiful and eloquent – except that it was not the truth about love. For, while Socrates often claimed that he knew nothing, in the *Symposium* he did declare that he knew nothing but “the workings of Love.” The distinction between Love personified and the workings of love is an essential element of the dialogue, and which, at least for the writer, remains tantalizing.

Diotima's association of Love with the desire to bring forth in beauty culminates in her description of how that desire may lead from the love of one being to a vision of the divine beauty transcending both the outer and inner worlds:

But what if man had eyes to see the true beauty – the divine beauty, I mean, pure and clear and unalloyed . . . thither looking, and holding converse with the true beauty, divine and simple?
[trans. Jowett]

The image of this Divine Ascent has been enormously influential, and Ficino's translation for Renaissance Europe inspired thought, art and literature. Arguably it informs many of Shakespeare's comedies and romances.

It also resonates with a passage early in the dialogue to which Dr Horan returned on occasion. Socrates was late for the banquet. His companion explains that he left him standing in a doorway, in a way that he had of “turning toward himself”.

This inner journey was the subject of Plotinus’ early tractate, *On the Three Primary Realities*, which was studied during our remaining time at Delphi. We are indebted to Pantazis Tzelemanis for a revised Greek translation, as well as an erudite series of evening lectures about Plotinus’ influence on the formation of early Christian dogma, including the Creed initially formulated at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325.

The Primary Realities, or *hypostases*, are presented in Plotinus’ Ennead V.1 as the One, Intellect or *Nous*, and the Soul. As Intellect is an image of and derives from the One, so Soul is an image of and derives from the Intellect. Plotinus also meets head-on the perennial problem of how the One, which has no parts and does not move, could ever lead to Intellect which contains the seed-forms for all the worlds of multiplicity.

But Plotinus’ object, like Plato’s, was not to deliver a pre-cooked answer on the nature of reality; rather, his overarching purpose was to encourage enquiry:

What is it, then, which has made the souls forget their father, God, and be ignorant of themselves and him . . . ?

Dr Horan pointed out that the text contains many calls to action:

And just as in nature there are these three [Realities] of which we have spoken, so *we ought to think* that they are present also to ourselves. [*italics added*]

The tractate ends with a programme for discovering the way back toward the One, the father which has been forgotten. Plotinus speaks with authority about “conscious apprehension” of this inner world, for it is clear that he consistently spent time there. He calls this ability a form of seeing:

Shut your eyes, and change to and wake another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use.
(*Ennead I.6, trans. Armstrong*)

And so another way to the Divine Ascent is presented. Ostensibly, one is by means of Love and another by Reason. To our modern minds,

. . . reason and love keep little company nowadays - the more the pity that some honest neighbours will not make them friends. (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream, III, 1*)

But are the paths so different after all? Ennead V.1 contains perhaps the only call to prayer to be found in Plotinus – “stretching ourselves out” without words to God alone. What could impel us even to take the first step, except some intimation of the most perfect and simple Beauty which, by its very nature, the soul loves and wishes to find?



Simon Laurent has been a member of the School of Philosophy for over thirty years. He has engaged in Shakespearean theatre, choral music and taught Sanskrit within the Auckland school. In recent years he has attended international gatherings to study Plato and Plotinus and will be a co-presenter at the Plato Week at Auckland in January 2016.

He is a senior lawyer, and presents industry seminars and provides comment for the media.

Those who have enjoyed this article and whose appetite has been whetted to a further consideration of "Love" by way of Plato's Symposium are invited to attend a residential Plato Summer School from 8 - 16 January 2016 in Auckland. The three Auckland School of Philosophy members, Matthew Roscoe, Russell Allan, and Simon Laurent, who attended the Delphi event will guide us to an appreciation of love's universal force and a deeper understanding of the relationship between love, beauty and immortality. Dr Horan's draft translation has been made available for this purpose.

The Symposium

**Six Men, One Night,
One Purpose:
To Praise Love**



**8th - 16th January
2016**

Waterperry Sanskrit Week 2015

Only seven and a half miles from Oxford City Centre lies Waterperry, an estate whose grounds include a stately house, 8 acres of gardens, a horticultural business, and a little church dating back to Saxon times.



In August this year, 145 students from Philosophy Schools all over the world gathered at Waterperry for the annual international Sanskrit Week. They came from the UK, the USA, Canada, Malta, Cyprus, South



Africa, Holland, Spain, Venezuela, and of course, from the Antipodes. The range of experience ran from beginners to those with many years of study behind them and even to those with degrees in the subject. It was inspiring to feel part of a worldwide network all linked by a love of the Sanskrit language.

[You may be wondering – what is the attraction of Sanskrit?](#)

As we were reminded during the week, Sanskrit is the original language of Advaita Vedanta and it is a language which has remained unchanged over the centuries. Dr. McComas Taylor, Head of the South Asia programme at the Australian National University, has had this to say about Sanskrit:

“There’s no way you can read Chaucer without a glossary because English is changing so quickly. But I can pick up a Sanskrit document written in the last 2000 years and make a good fist of it. In 1000 years’ time Sanskrit will still be the same, but every other language will have changed beyond recognition.”

The renowned linguist and judge, Sir William Jones, writing in the 18th century observed:

“The Sanskrit language...is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either.”

Perhaps more importantly, as many of us testify, the sound of Sanskrit is transformative.

At Waterperry we were divided into groups of about 12-15 students, each group having a tutor and co-tutor to lead us through a daily programme which included chanting, study of verses from the Māṇḍūkya Upanishad, Sanskrit grammar, and concluding with a plenary meeting led by the new Sanskrit Head, Mr. Warwick Jessup. His answers to questions were insightful and inspiring.

Many elements contributed to the success of the occasion: The spiritual substance and power in the sounds of Sanskrit, the efficiency with which the event was managed, the care for individual students, the balance of the programme, the beauty of the venue, and of course the open attitudes and level of attention brought by the students themselves.



The being was fed on all levels, not least by bountiful, laden tables! However the real sustenance was at a very deep level and I came away feeling rejuvenated. Sanskrit has that kind of power!



Tessa Stephens

If this article has whetted your appetite to pursue a study of Sanskrit, several opportunities are available.

There are classes before Group on several evenings and another on Saturday morning. If enough students express interest, new classes could begin. Inquiries to Elaine Kearney Ph 535-9096 or elainek@orcon.net.nz

Tivoli



Amid the bay trees and olives
Lizards with bright black eyes
And lacquered skins
Scuttle like living cloisonné,
Defy gravity on the baked stone walls.

On the cool grass
Lying under heaven
Clear headed in the heat
Among the sweet scent of herbs and earth
I think -

An Emperor walked here once
A searcher of stars
And of his own soul,

Advocate of inner alchemy,
Builder of brick and stone,
Bright beauty written
In the earth.

Now ruins,
Circles within circles
Under the rim of the air,
Where one world meets another –
I rest in a substance left of sweet peace
Between the earth and sky.



Hamish Hudson

This poem was composed while the author was lying on the grass at Hadrian's Villa in Italy. The [villa](#) was constructed at Tibur (modern-day Tivoli) as a retreat from Rome the Roman Emperor Hadrian during the second and third decades of the 2nd century AD.

Hadrian was the Roman Emperor from 117 to 138 AD. He rebuilt the Pantheon and constructed the Temple of Venus and Roma. He is also known for building Hadrian's Wall which marked the northern limit of Britannia. Hadrian was regarded by some as a humanist and was a lover of all things Greek in most of his tastes. He is regarded as one of the Five Good Emperors.

The Tui sings three notes

The Premiere of 'The Tui Sings Three Notes', a composition by Leonie Holmes

In 2014, Dr. Leonie Holmes asked if I would contribute words for a commission she had received from Professor Karen Grylls of the University of Auckland.

Leonie Holmes, one of New Zealand's leading composers, is a lecturer in Composition and Music Studies at the School of Music, University of Auckland. She has written works for orchestra, chamber, choral, vocal and solo instrument, and receives frequent commissions from both professional and community groups. Dr. Holmes has a particular interest in orchestral music, examples being "Aqua Sulis", "Fronde", "Ancient Rhythms", "For Young Nick" and "Solstice", all of which have been recorded by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

On this occasion, what was required was a 6-8 minute work for choir to be performed at the Auckland Music School's Graduation Gala Concerto Concert on 7th May.

Because of material we were studying in our Philosophy Group at the time, the mind was full of ideas about Creation and Dissolution. Thinking and research centred on the enneagram, or circle of nine points, which had long been an interest. However, the themes being investigated were not exclusively Vedantic. The original ideas were larded with Greek mythology, Shakespearean allusions, Maori myths and legends and even T.S. Eliot's 'Four Quartets'.

I made a table of some of these notions and showed it to Leonie. She liked the ideas and took them to Professor Grylls who also approved. Now a poem had to be produced. Thus, what had become an enormous range of material had to be pruned down and down to six minutes for a choir! What finally emerged was 'Cycles'. Leonie used a line from the poem as her title: 'The Tui Sings Three Notes'. The following words were read out on the night out as an introduction to the performance.

'The words the choir sing come from the poem "Cycles" by Tessa Stephens, and refer to the cycle of Creation, from the beginning Sound through the elements of Aether, Air, Fire, Water and Earth. The shape of the music follows this idea, with a solo opening growing into full life, and then at the very end fading into the hint of a new dawn. As well as the University of Auckland combined choir and chamber choir, the piece features School of Music Faculty Te Oti Rakana and Morag Atchison as soloists, James Tibbles organ, Robert Wiremu piano, and Samuel Girling and Samuel Rich percussion, and is conducted by Associate Professor Karen Grylls.'

Listen to a video recording of the premiere at the Gala concert, 7th May 2015.

<https://youtu.be/4vigXPQPW4U>

Cycles

In the beginning, One alone.
One desires to be many.
'Sphota' seeds the void!

Ākāśa! Transformer,
Aether of Ancients!
Subtle waves weave vital Air,
Feather-light, afloat on dreams
Of Springtime.

And Air becomes Fire,
Sun-lanced, aquiver with light.
Fire cools.
Subtle alchemy spawns water,
In deep blues and greens,
Surging surf, slow streams.
Moist seed-beds meld sound and sense,
Name and form.

Now the incoming tide
Shuffles its feet on crisp shells,
Rinses the rock-pools as children play.
Laughter, warmth, and fragrant bush
Where the tui sings three notes,
Vivid and profound.
And Life is tasted on the tongue,
For just a little moment

Then, Time's toll must be paid.
Matter melts, dries to dust,
Shimmers into nothing,
Yet something.
Hint of a new dawn.

Tessa Stephens

Why am I in School?

During the years that I have been a student in the School of Philosophy in Auckland I have heard myself saying that I came to New Zealand to find the School. I think this is true.



I was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Canada and like many Canadians my parents moved west while I was still a preschooler. I grew up in Vernon, British Columbia. Vernon had one primary school, one intermediate school and one secondary school (state schools). There was also a Catholic primary school. There were three churches a Presbyterian (United Church), an Anglican Church, a Catholic Church and somewhat later a Lutheran church as Vernon's small population of German immigrants grew. I grew up as Lynn Stewart and my paternal grandmother was very Presbyterian Scottish but my parents asked me what school I wanted to go to and I said the Catholic school so I went to the Catholic school and for many years I wanted to be a nun. I did also attend the United Church's Sunday school

and as an older teenager I was a Sunday School teacher. My parents sang in the church choir. I really did want to be a nun but being an only child and a girl my parents had other expectations so I went to the University of British Columbia in Vancouver to study medicine (after 3 years I dropped out of medicine, I found it boring, and studied theatre instead). While at university I became involved with the Catholic students' group. They had the most amazing weekend retreats where we were not allowed to talk. I know I was searching for universal truth that is more easily experienced in stillness. I came to New Zealand to find the school.

I also found a man in Auckland who had been in the School in Wellington and when I started looking for a church or other spiritual group to be part of he suggested I enrol in the School of Philosophy. So I did. I went to the Society of Arts Building, I think it was the beginning of Term 2 in 1972. There were about 60 students. The room was full and Mr Russell took the meeting. What really caught my attention was the care of the building where we were meeting; someone had polished the copper pipes under the sink in the bathroom.

I had the unforgettable privilege of meeting the Maharishi in Vancouver while I was at university and I had discovered the Transcendental Meditation group in Hamilton so had been initiated. I had a mantra but I was struggling with meditating. Mr Russell took very special care of me and gave me the school's mantra and I had regular meditation checks. Being able to meditate has changed the way I live my life and this would not have been possible without the School's expert and dedicated support.

I have been truly blessed in my early experiences at school. I had opportunities to look after Mr and Mrs Russell and Mrs Payne and Mr McLaren. I learnt so much. Mr Russell gave me away at my wedding. Barrie Preston's mother was one of my best friends; we use to teach together at the same primary

school. As we lived near each other in Herne Bay, Barrie, his mother Moira and I often travelled together to our philosophy groups in the city and we talked.

I clearly remember being introduced to the practice of being in the moment and connecting with the senses. I will never forget the experience of sitting in a bath and really connecting with my toes that were sticking out of the water. Being in the moment and connecting with one's senses made washing the dishes fun.

Having been in the school for over 40 years I have been part of the School growing and the School's purchases of a number of buildings. I have learnt something about work. There has been quite a bit of sanding and painting and cleaning and even laying cement under Mr Marshall's skilled guidance. I have learnt so much by having many opportunities to work under discipline with a group of fellow School Students. The mind seems naturally wired to be 'noisy' but the practise of pausing between activities and simply giving attention to the activity you are doing really works at making the mind quieter. I have learnt that we might not have control over what happens but we do have control over what we choose to think, do and feel. I continue to feel blessed that I have the opportunity to meditate with other School students twice a week. It provides the opportunity to experience what meditation can be.

I can certainly also experientially vouch for the huge benefits of 'pausing' and the Shruti. When practised they change lives. I have been teaching the pause exercise for years in my role as a practising psychologist and counsellor and I pause between seeing 'clients'. It is not helpful to have a mind full of busyness when the point of a meeting is to connect with the person in front of you.

I admit to still needing as much help as I can get and I admit to needing to be more conscientious with practice and study but I know my attendance at group, weekends and residential weeks as well as reading the scriptures and studying allow me to understand and experience that the true purpose of this human journey is to know the Self.

I know why I am in Auckland, New Zealand and I know why I am in School.

Lynn Billinge (nee Berresford)

A much loved member of the School of Philosophy for many years, Lynn is a Registered Psychologist (M.Ed (Hons), Dip Teaching (Distinction)) with over 30 years of experience of working with children, teenagers and adults with exceptional needs. A frequently invited speaker at national and international conferences Lynn has developed an extensive and practical knowledge of these individuals who learn differently which has resulted in her recognition as a dedicated, experienced and skilled advocate for individuals who have behaviours reflecting Giftedness, Dyslexia, Attention Deficits, Dyspraxia, Aspergers etc.

Marjan's story

At the recent Cultural day, Dr Craig Hassed of Melbourne explained and explored the topic of Epigenetics, particularly “Playing the genetic hand we have been dealt”, and revealed research based links between changes in our DNA attributable to lifestyle, diet and mindfulness practices. I was not alone in finding this talk inspirational, and by one of those wonderful coincidences that I label as grace, discussion after we had finished lunch preparation revealed that my fellow helper, Marjan Askarian-Amiri was also a researcher in Epigenetics. I have asked her to share a little of her life journey and pathway to the School of Philosophy with us.

Liz Godfrey

I was born in Babol a small city in the North of Iran, and completed my schooling and first degree in physiotherapy at the Medical University of Shiraz.

Although it was an unusual move for a single girl to move to the other side of the world, I came to NZ in 1994 to continue my tertiary study. I did not know much about NZ but one of my lecturers who had studied in the UK advised me to study here and with the support of my mother, I was lucky enough to get a student visa (no easy task at the time for Iranians).



Changing my major from physiotherapy to biochemistry was a challenging decision since I had to restart at 2nd year level in yet another major but the passion and the curiosity of knowing more about the function of cells and the building blocks of “life” made this transition easier. I graduated with a PhD in Biochemistry from the University of Otago in 2004. My student life in Otago was a very special chapter in my life journey, not only because of my study area but during that time I met my best friends including my life time partner Sasan.

During my postgraduate studies I also had a wonderful Professor/mentor who not only taught me how to perform research but also many practical life lessons. You could say that he was my first philosophy teacher. Much of his wisdom started to sink in when I started attending the philosophy school. He is a great NZ scientist and I appreciate that his knowledge, wisdom and supervision got me where I am today.

For my doctorate I worked on the mechanism of protein synthesis in the cell. On completion I moved to the Max Planck Institute in Germany to study the mechanism of gene splicing, but my journey to the world of epigenetics really started when I moved to the University of Queensland in 2006.

The first lesson in biology is that DNA (genes) are transcribed to RNA (an intermediate molecule) that acts as a template and that is translated into protein. The central dogma of biology in the last 50 years

has been that your destiny lies on your genes, which means any health issue you may have can be blamed on your parents, grandparents and great grandparents. In the last decade accumulated data has shown that gene regulation and what controls genes is more important than just relying on genes. Epigenetics is the study of cellular and physiological phenotypic trait variations that are caused by external or environmental factors that switch genes on and off and affect how cells read genes instead of being caused by changes in the DNA sequence.

I was attracted to epigenetics or some elements of it called “noncoding RNA” in 2005. You may ask what is noncoding RNA? They are the genes that do not code for proteins and apparently make up 98% of the human genome. I have been working in the noncoding RNA field since 2006. If you look at the different cells of liver, lung, brain, skin etc they all contain the same DNA though they function differently. The question I was trying to answer was how these cells act differently if they have the same genetic material. The answer is that all these cells have a different gene expression pattern. It is like a computer with lots of applications installed, not all working at the same time. So all genes are not expressing at the same time. What switches a gene on or off? In the last decade it has been shown that lots of noncoding RNAs are acting as regulatory molecules that control gene expression.

I was asked how my research is connected to Dr. Hassed. Dr. Hassed talked about epigenetics and how gene regulation can be changed by meditation and mindfulness practices. I am investigating the mechanism of action for these phenomena. In particular, my research at the University of Auckland is looking at the role of noncoding RNA in gene regulation in cancer. In many cancers we don't see not much change in DNA, however the cancer cell has an aberrant gene expression pattern. Some are caused by other epigenetic mechanisms, but there are examples that the cancer gene is deregulated due to noncoding.

How and why I found my way to the School of Philosophy?

I have to give thanks to my other half, “Sasan” my dearest friend and life-time partner. He used to go to the School in Wellington, and since he moved to Auckland he encouraged me to join. I hesitated as it was a night class. In February 2014 we decided to give it a go and that was it. I was hooked. What I have learned and practiced has had a significant, positive impact in my life. I am more detached and free, I look at things differently, being less judgmental, happier and a better observer. The latter is particularly helpful for my research work. Even my students and colleagues see and comment on the changes in me! Now all my family are students in the school and I have pressed a couple of friends to come along. Thank you Sasan Joining was one of the best decisions I have made in my life.

Marjan Askarian-Amiri

From the Bookshop Spring 2015



*'To seek it with thimbles ,to seek it with care;
To pursue it with forks and hope;
To threaten its life with a railway share;
To charm it with smiles and soap!
For the Snarks a peculiar creature, that won't
Be caught in a commonplace way.
Do all that you know, and try all that you don't:
Not a chance must be wasted to-day!*

With gratitude to Lewis Carroll for a charming wee poem, 'The Hunting of the Snark' that with a simple change of the word Snark to Self, sums up centuries of philosophic teaching. The sense is that in the search for truth, having exhausted all the methods that we know of to no avail, there is the 'not knowing' that Socrates speaks of, and it becomes a constant endeavor. The poem goes on to point out that one of the dangers of the 'hunt' is that the moment you think you have got hold of the 'Snark' it immediately turns into something else not particularly nice, called a 'Boojum' – pride and arrogance come to mind. It's a wonderful poem, well worth a read, nonsense maybe – who can say?



New books appearing in the Bookshop are further titles from Dr. Craig Hassed who will be visiting Auckland in November so it's a good opportunity to get a preview and have questions ready. As with all presentations, questions open a door to the speakers depth of subject knowledge.

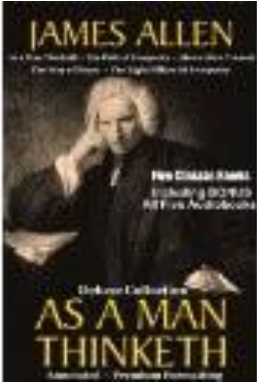
Lastly a mention that due to a change of administration at the 'Study Society' bookshop, the supply in bulk of their range has been interrupted. Hopefully this is changing as individual orders seem to be getting processed.

Geoff Long

You might like to read...

As A Man Thinketh, by James Allen

The opening line in the Author's foreword "This little volume (the result of meditation and



experience)..." promised much to one who considers these key to finding ongoing peace and joy. And overall James Allen delivers.

Published in 1903 when Allen was 39, *As A Man Thinketh* is the title of the first work in this 5 volume collection, "Favourite James Allen Works". Probably Allen's best known book, it is an excellent introduction to the man often considered the father of the "self-help" movement.

The book sometimes reads like a stream of aphorisms, which could have become tedious. But the simple truth in Allen's words overcame any resistance to his writing style. I was drawn into his text by statements like "*Work joyfully and peacefully*" and "*Calmness of mind is one of the beautiful jewels of wisdom*". With ideas of this quality throughout, it is a book to be savoured rather than read in one sitting (the book is quite short). Reading a few pages each evening acted as a brief meditation and was a fine way to close a day.

Throughout Allen links how we think to our experience of life. He encourages the reader to cleanse the mind as the starting point to a better life "a strong body and a bright, happy, or serene countenance can only result from the free admittance into the mind of thoughts of joy and goodwill and serenity".

As A Man Thinketh provided an excellent introduction to Allen's thought and led one very easily to continue on and read the remaining four books in this volume. All were written in the same style with the same central theme – you are responsible for your life and its circumstances; "Men are anxious to



Mark Rassie

improve their circumstances, but are unwilling to improve themselves; they therefore remain bound". Allen's life provided him with ample opportunity to test such ideas in practice. At 15 he lost his father. Of necessity he left school to find work and help support his remaining family members.

The edition read was published by Northpointe Classics 2009, in the Amazon Kindle format. *As A Man Thinketh* is also available as a free download from Project Gutenberg.

Editor's Note: This book has recently become available from the Bookshop for those who prefer the tangible, hard copy version.

News from Ficino Spring 2015



Ficino's Inaugural Art and Jazz Evening a Resounding Success

Combining good music, fine wines, fabulous food (varied and plentiful) and art, with a few bargains to be had, Ficino School's first Art and Jazz Evening proved to be a very enjoyable and successful night.



There were some marvellous art and other items donated by both the school and business communities. This generosity and energetic bidding for the children's art pieces resulted in a healthy total of funds raised to

support the ongoing upgrade of Ficino School's drama facilities and the 2016 Renaissance Tour. The focus on the school's drama facilities is particularly timely given the upcoming production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the Year 7 and 8

students in just a few weeks.

It was lovely to see not only current parents, but parents of alumni, members of the School of Philosophy and the Board present.

The children's gorgeous class art pieces shared the limelight with the work of professional artists and a stunning venue. Our thanks once again to the Auckland School of Philosophy for allowing us to use the historic and beautiful building at 268 West Tamaki Drive for the evening.



The annual Shakespeare production



In the ongoing tradition of providing the students with the opportunity to fully engage with fine thought and drama, Ficino School's Year 7 & 8 students are proud to present William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream. These performances are always memorable, not only for the enthusiasm and ability of the students but also as an example of the level of understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare's timeless words that can be achieved with primary school age children.

Join us!

Performance times:

Wednesday 18 – Friday 20 November: 7.30pm

Saturday 21 November: 2.00pm and 7.30pm

Venue: Ficino School Hall, 27 Esplanade Rd, Mt Eden

Tickets

Phone 623 3385 or email office@ficino.school.nz to book your tickets. Payment is either via direct debit to the school bank account or in person at the school office.

The selection of photos below of some recent activities exemplifies the three platforms on which the Ficino school is based: striving for academic excellence, expanding children's horizons through the rich material found in our global traditions, and practising mindfulness. The activities portrayed are

- Students participating in the Jump Rope for Heart programme run by the Heart Foundation.
- Ficino School students in Classes 3 to 8 at Tiri Tiri Matangi in the Hauraki Gulf at the end of term 3. Everyone enjoyed their experience in this natural haven for our native birds and marine life.
- Students participating in the annual Cross country run on the slopes of Mt Eden.
- Several students submitted projects to the annual NIWA Auckland Science and Technology Fair. This event lets our senior students test their scientific and technological investigation methods and produce projects which adhere to strict scientific guidelines. This project pictured received an award of Highly Commended.



– The Greek mythological story of Perseus and the Gorgon Medusa was adapted and a play written by Miss Doctor for performance by her class. Under her meticulous direction, and dedicated assistance from parents, Year Four produced something magical. The performance was full of humour for both the children and adult audiences. The story itself speaks of the triumph of courage, goodness and determination over the deadly effects of too much pride.

We welcome visitors to the school, particularly those who might be considering enrolling a child. Tours are available.

Dates: Friday 27 November 2015, Friday 12 February 2016, Friday 26 February 2016.

Further information about our activities can be obtained at www.ficino.school.nz

From the Editor:

Contributions for the next issue of Vision will be sought in the New Year. Suggestions for articles of interest are most welcome.

It should be noted that the views expressed in this document are not necessarily those of the School of Philosophy Auckland.

Liz Godfrey

